

The Amateur in You, Part 1

What have you been pondering?



Asking for the impossible

Once in a while, I see a question similar to this exaggerated example:

I live in an apartment that doesn't allow any ham radio operation, and where I'm not permitted to install any kind of antenna. But I want to communicate with anybody anywhere on any band. How can I do that?

You might laugh at this unlikely question, but I hear something like it a lot more these days than ever before. In other words, *How can I do the impossible?* At first, a number of rather snarky or smart-alecky answers might come to mind, but the person asking the question is quite serious, and earnestly wants a solution. Another thought is to nit-pick the words "permitted" or "install", yet we know what the person is truly asking, regardless how we might want to spin the meaning, at the pretense of requesting clarification.

The person wants to explore amateur radio, but has restrictions. The answer "that depends" is often given out of frustration, but rarely helps. So, what can we say that's helpful? Often, the person asking doesn't always know what he doesn't know, and might look to you for ideas. Here are a few suggestions you might consider offering:

- Get a [mobile radio](#), a [mag-mount antenna](#), and a [cookie sheet](#). Attach it to a filing cabinet or your fridge, and try getting on local repeaters, or at least listen to them. Monitor the [National Simplex frequency](#) in case somebody needs your help.
- If your antenna prohibition is due to HOA or personal rules against an unsightly antenna, you can try mounting an antenna on a flagpole or an old dish mount. Or get an [HOA Buster](#), which takes advantage of your house's rain downspout (not good for houses with aluminum siding.)
- Use the [Web SDR](#) to listen to other amateurs around the world.

- MFJ does happen to make an "apartment-friendly" antenna built just for those who have an outdoor-exposed balcony railing or similar, the [MFJ-1622](#) HF Apartment Dweller Antenna. Simply clamp it to your railing, let the counterpoise wire hang down, and operate from 40 meters to 2 meters. When you're finished operating, simply roll up the wire, un-clamp the antenna, and within five minutes it looks like you were never on the radio. If you don't have a balcony, you can clamp it to a fixture, such as a desk, table, or bookshelf. I've used this antenna, and it's far from ideal, and requires some adjusting, but it's better than nothing.
- Do things that don't require operating a radio, such as helping with event setup, club organization, teaching classes, serving an exam session, writing articles, installing antennas, making presentations, and building antennas or other gear. That might not answer the original *How can I*, but it can still make you a useful part of the hobby.
- Try operating away from home by going portable or mobile, or using a station at somebody else's house. Even an HT in your vehicle can be a lot of fun, especially with an antenna out on your roof.
- If you anticipate moving your home in the near future, try checking out locations that might be a little easier on you ham-wise.

So, bottom line is, in most cases all is not lost. There are still ways to enjoy ham radio, even within your restrictions.

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